
Birding Africa's basement— the Cape to the Kalahari

Keith Barnes

Part I—The Cape of Good Hope

Cape Town—arguably Africa's most beautiful city—is a phenomenal base from which to bird South Africa. Two weeks in the vicinity of the city could yield over 400 species, including 47 of the country's 58 endemics and near-endemics, and 126 of southern Africa's 180 endemics, making it an indispensable destination for anyone interested in the continent's birds. This article outlines the best birding spots and routes, specifically targeting endemics, both South and southern African. The amount of time required to bird each route is suggested and the birding, scenery and general tourism features are all rated. Prices in Rand (R) are quoted. At the time of writing (April 1999) US\$ 1 = R 6.3, with the Rand falling constantly.

Getting around

Birding around Cape Town by public transport is possible, but exceptionally difficult. The majority of the sites listed here are not accessible using public transport and one would have to take general or specialist tours to get there. If you want to "DIY", the best option is car hire; the major agents at the airport are Budget (27-21-9340216), Avis (27-21-934-0808, 88) and Hertz (27-21-386-1560), but some smaller operators with cheaper options include Cape Car Hire (27-21-683-2441), Safari rentals (4x4s & minibuses, permitted into neighbouring states 27-21-644-895) and Affordable Car Hire (27-21-439-1899). For more information on guided tours in the western Cape see Sugarbird's Home Page at <http://home.mweb.co.za/kb/kbarnes>.

Accommodation

Accommodation (and price and quality) options vary dramatically in Cape Town; for a full review check out Sugarbirds' Home Page; in particular, two excellent and very affordable guest houses exist on the peninsula that cater principally for birders. Windy Ridge (Tel/Fax: 27-21-786-1414; E-mail: cardwell@iafrica.com) in Simonstown and Afton Grove (Tel: 785-2992; Fax: 785-3456; E-mail: afton@iafrica.com; <http://www.afton.co.za>) in Noordhoek are both superb, run by birders and come highly recommended.

Cape Peninsula (1–2 days)—The Cape of Storms!

• Birds: 7/10 • Scenery: 10/10 • General tourism value: 10/10
Forced from the ocean bed by incomprehensible tectonic forces, a spectacular 1 km high and 70 km

long mass of sandstone juts out into one of the most hostile oceans in the world, the southern Atlantic—this is the Cape Peninsula. This route should take one day, although it has been broken up into various subsections should one choose to proceed at a more leisurely pace.

Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens

The best place to begin is the world-renowned Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens on the hind ridge of Table Mountain. Ideally situated close to town, one will be rewarded by spending as little as one hour in the gardens. To get there from town, take Eastern Boulevard (M3) and proceed along Union Avenue. At the Rhodes Drive intersection, c 2 km beyond the red-roofed university, turn right. The gardens are a further 2 km along Rhodes Drive and are well signposted. Several fynbos specialities can be seen with remarkable ease in the cultivated erica and protea gardens (ask for a map at the entrance point) including the skulking **Grassbird** *Sphenoeacus afer*, energetic **Orange-breasted Sunbird** *Nectarinia violacea* and flamboyant **Cape Sugarbird** *Promerops cafer*. Other specialities include **Cape Siskin** *Serinus totta*, **Cape Bulbul** *Pycnonotus capensis* and the remarkably tame **Cape Francolin** *Francolinus capensis*. Also common in the gardens are other South African endemics such as **Lesser Double-collared Sunbird** *Nectarinia chalybea*, **Karoo Prinia** *Prinia maculosa*, **Southern Boubou** *Laniarius ferrugineus*, **Cape White-eye** *Zosterops pallidus*, **Cape Sparrow** *Passer melanurus* and **Grey-backed Cisticola** *Cisticola subruficapillus*. Keep your eyes peeled skywards for **Mountain (Forest) Buzzard** *Buteo oreophilus*, which is regularly seen along with the more common (and potentially confusing) **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo vulpinus*. The tall avenue of oak trees near the garden's entrance, behind the conservatory, has regularly held a breeding pair of **Spotted Eagle Owl** *Bubo africanus*.

The Afro-montane forest patches, particularly in Skelton gorge, support **Forest Canary** *Serinus scotops*, **African Dusky Alseonak** *Muscicapa adusta*, **African Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone viridis*, **Cape Batis** *Batis capensis*, **Cinnamon Dove** *Columba larvata*, **Rameron Pigeon** *C. arquatix* and the noisy **Sombre Greenbul** *Andropadus importunus*. The



Grassbird *Spbenoeacus afer* by Ian Lewington

main attraction is **Knysna Warbler** *Bradypterus sylvaticus*, a species more usually heard than seen. Chances are best in September–November when it is most vociferous and responsive, at the top of the gorge where the vegetation is sparser.

Farther up-slope, the gardens revert to natural fynbos vegetation and rocky outcrops, where **Cape Siskin**, **Ground Woodpecker** *Geocolaptes olivaceus*, **Familiar Chat** *Cercomela familiaris*, **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*, **Cape Rock Thrush** *Monticola rupestris* and **White-necked Raven** *Corvus albicollis* are common, and overhead watch for **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*, **Alpine Apus** *melba*, **Black A.** *barbatus* and **Little Swifts** *A. affinis*. Similar species can be found by taking the cable car to the top of the mountain, which holds more species of flowering plant than the British Isles.

Wildevölvlei and Kommetjie

From Kirstenbosch, head south in the direction of Hout Bay along the M63—which turns into the spectacular Chapmans Peak drive after passing through Hout Bay. As this descends into Noordhoek, keep going straight until you reach Sun Valley; turn right at the T-junction; soon you reach an intersection—turn right onto the M65 (Kommetjie Road). After c4 km you reach an industrial park, with a large wetland on your right—this is Wildevölvlei. For access to the marsh, turn into the housing development at Imhoff's Gift, and park in Rameron Avenue.

Some excellent and unusual birds are regularly seen here, including **White-backed Duck** *Thalassornis leuconotus*, **Maccoa Duck** *Oxyura maccoa*, **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybridus*, **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*, **African Marsh Harrier** *Circus ranivorus* and **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*. A host of more common waterfowl also occurs. At the time of writing this wetland was suffering eutrophication problems and it would be wise to obtain more information about its status before planning a visit.

Leaving Wildevölvlei, continue south-west along Kommetjie Road. Once in Kommetjie, take the turn

to the right immediately beyond the Kommetjie Hotel. This is the last turn before the road ascends to a scenic coastal drive toward Scarborough. This road skirts the hotel parking area and continues past a large tidal pool to the wind-buffed Kommetjie promontory—park here. Scan the rocks and tidal pool for Benguela-endemics such as **Hartlaub's Gull** *Larus hartlaubii*, **Bank Phalacrocorax** *neglectus*, **Crowned P.** *coronatus* and **Cape Cormorants** *P. capensis*, **African Black Oystercatcher** *Haematopus moquini*, and other species such as **White-fronted Plover** *Charadrius marginatus* and **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*. In winter, the sea should be scanned for pelagic species that occasionally venture inshore. **White-chinned Petrel** *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus*, **Cape Gannet** *Sula capensis* (all year) and **South Polar Skua** *Catharacta macconnicki* are regularly seen and it would not be surprising to see a **Shy Diomedea** *cauta* or **Black-browed Albatross** *D. melanophris* effortlessly dipping below the horizon. Winter also brings **Antarctic Tern** *Sterna vittata* to the roost that regularly gathers in the tidal pool. Sift through the **Swift** *S. bergii* and **Sandwich Terns** *S. sandwicensis*, and in summer **Arctic S.** *paradisaea* and **Common Terns** *S. hirundo*, in search of something rare. Check the tide tables as more birds roost at low tide; weekends should also be avoided as fishermen and boat launching disturbs the roost. If, at first, you do not see all the species you are seeking, take a walk north along the beach as birds roost there also. An early morning walk here may reward the vigilant observer with a **Cape Clawless Otter** *Aonyx capensis capensis*.

Cape Point Nature Reserve

Continue south along the M65, past Misty Cliffs and Scarborough, to the Cape Point Nature Reserve. Forming the southern portion of the peninsula, this reserve can also be reached from Muizenberg and Simon's Town via the M4. You can enjoy the reserve's sensational and idyllic scenery while looking for additional fynbos specialities, including the numerous **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and **Cape Sugarbird**, as well as seabirds from the south-westernmost point in Africa. Don't miss the opportunity to scan for albatrosses and the occasional **Peregrine Falcon** at the Cape Point lighthouse. The viewing sites at the point also hold **Cape Siskin**. Other species include **Cape Bulbul**, **Speckled Mousebird** *Colius striatus*, **Fiscal Flycatcher** *Melaenornis silens*, **Bokmakierie** *Malaconotus zeylonus*, **Southern Boubou**, **Neddicky** *Cisticola fulvicapillus* and **Karoo Prinia**. The reserve has attracted many rarities, including a **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda* that

established itself on the cliffs. The plains toward Sirkelsvlei support **Black-rumped Button-Quail** *Turnix hottentotta* and **Cloud Cisticola** *Cisticola textrix*. **Malachite Sunbird** *Nectarinia famosa* can be found in certain *Leonotis* patches and the ubiquitous **Red-winged Starling** *Onychognathus morio* is ever-present.

The reserve is also home to the strange **Bontebok** *Damaliscus dorcas* and elegant **Eland** *Taurotragus oryx*. Beware of the **Chacma Baboons** *Papio ursinus*—they have become decidedly cheeky within the reserve—and please don't feed them. A minimum entry fee of R 20 (or R 10 per person whichever is more) is charged.

Boulders Bay

Leaving the reserve, return to Cape Town along the False Bay coastline, via the M4. As you enter suburban Simonstown, look for a golf course on the right (coastal) side. At the northern perimeter of the golf course turn right onto Bellevue Road. Start looking for penguins immediately. The colony is expanding, and birds have been recorded attempting to incubate golf balls! This idyllic spot consists of white beaches, protected by large granite boulders, and permanently inhabited by the little black-and-white suited **Jackass Penguin** *Spheniscus demersus*. A must-see venue, the birds can be approached extremely closely. **African Black Oystercatcher** and **Cape** and **Crowned Cormorants** are regularly seen on the rocks. The strandveld vegetation holds **White-backed Mousebird** *Colius colius*, **Lesser Double-collared Sunbird** and occasionally **Cape Sugarbird**.

Strandfontein Sewage Works

To visit this site one requires a waiver issued by the Cape Bird Club (Tel: 27-21-686-8795) on behalf of the Cape Metropolitan Council. Please ensure you have one before visiting. From Simonstown head north along the coastal road. Beyond Clovelly, do not take Boyes Drive, which heads up the mountainside, but continue along the coastal road to Muizenberg. From there take Baden Powell Drive (R 310) and turn into Strandfontein Road (M17) c 7 km from the circle. After 4 km turn left to Zeekoevlei and the sewage works are on the northern shore of False Bay. One of the best wetland sites in South Africa, it holds up to 94 species of waterbird, 45 breeding species, including the endemic **South African Shelduck** *Tadorna cana* and **Cape Shoveler** *Anas smithii* and (in summer) many waders and terns.

Pelagic magic—sensational seabird frenzy (1 day)

• Birds: 10/10 • Scenery: 6/10 • General tourism value: 4/10
Ever grimaced while ticking an albatross from land,

when your field guide offers more detail than the speck you saw dipping under the horizon? In South Africa, a series of pelagic options exist so that you may scoff in delight as these majestic oceanic wanderers approach too close for you to focus. Many seabird specialists, unsurprisingly, regard the Western Cape as one of the best pelagic birding spots in the world, regularly supporting hundreds of thousands of seabirds. Seabird abundance is particularly high due to the highly productive, nutrient-rich upwelling Benguela current, derived from Antarctica's icy waters. Very few places provide such world-class harbours and ships, a plethora of exciting species and the spectacle of 1,000s of seabirds squabbling over scraps behind fishing boats.

Sailing from Simonstown or Hout Bay, operating trawlers are targeted specifically. As many as 5,000 seabirds, of 15–20 different species, could be awaiting your arrival. Approaching an operating trawler sets one amidst one of the largest seabird feeding frenzies on the globe. Once the initial adrenaline rush is under control, and you have fought off the crippling views of **Black-browed**, **Shy** or **Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** *Diomedea chlororhynchos*, **White-chinned Petrel**, **Cape Gannet**, **Sooty Shearwater** and **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*, you can begin to sift through the clouds of birds in search of less common species. The composition of the flocks, and your chances of seeing various species, varies according to season.

In winter (May–August), one has the best chance of finding **Wandering Albatross** *Diomedea exulans*, **Northern Macronektes** *halli* and **Southern Giant Petrels** *M. giganteus*, **Pintado Petrel** *Daption capense*, **Broad-billed Pachyptila** *vittata*, **Antarctic P. desolata** and **Salvin's Prions** *P. (v.) salvini*, **South Polar Skua** and rarely **Southern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialisoides*. Spring (September–October) brings passage migrants such as **Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis* and **Great Shearwater** *Puffinus gravis*. In summer (November–February), the Benguela attracts Palearctic migrants including **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea*, **Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus*, **British Storm-Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus*, **Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* and **Sabine's Gull** *Larus sabini*. Other summer visitors include **Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes*, **Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma macroptera* (a winter breeder on the Prince Edward Islands), **Great Shearwater** (which breeds on the Tristan group) and **Leach's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* (which breeds on South Africa's coastal islands). Autumn (March–April) brings the best chance of seeing **Black-bellied Storm-Petrel** *Fregatta tropica* as it heads for warmer tropical

climes.

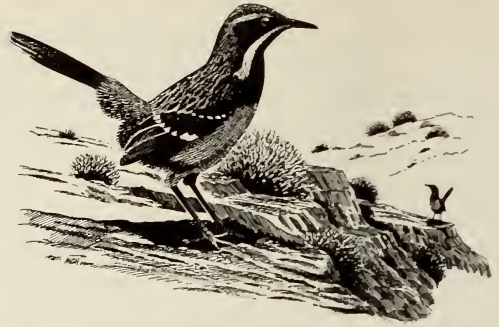
The Western Cape is known for its variety of vagrant pelagic species. Although unlikely, the following are some of the more spectacular species that are possible: **Royal** *Diomedea epomophora*, **Grey-headed** *D. chrysostoma* and (**Dark-mantled Sooty**) **Albatrosses** *Phoebetria fusca*, **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis*, and one of the best chances in the world of seeing the extremely rare and endangered **Spectacled Petrel** *Procellaria (aequinoctialis) conspicillata* (which breeds on the Tristan Group). Check the Sugarbird Home page for latest options on pelagic trips in the Western Cape. It is advisable to bring seasickness medicine as the waters can turn rough suddenly.

Sir Lowry's Pass and Betty's Bay (1 day)— Traversing False Bay

• Birds: 9/10 • Scenery: 8/10 • General tourism value: 6/10

The nearest place to Cape Town holding a full complement of the fynbos specials, Sir Lowry's Pass in the Hottentots Holland Mountains is not to be missed. To get there follow the N2 from Cape Town to Somerset West and begin ascending the pass. At the summit, a parking lot will appear suddenly on the right-hand side of the road. Cross to the side of the road opposite the parking lot. Beyond the ditch, clamber through the broken fence which is a disused entrance. A wide path, formerly an access road, climbs to the left. Walk north-east, along the upper of the two tracks that lead from a cleared area adjacent to the road. After c1 km there is excellent fynbos habitat. If the ericas are flowering, **Orange-breasted Sunbird** will be active. Look for protea trees with large yellow pincushion flowers—these mixed *Leucospermum conocarpodendron* and *Protea neriifolia* stands are regularly visited by the magnificent **Cape Sugarbird**. A high-pitched monotonous zitting should give away **Neddicky** and in wetter vegetation the **Grassbird**'s descending warble (easily confused with that of Victorin's Warbler) is usually evident.

After c1.5 km, a sedge-seep filled with long reed-like *Elegia capensis* and *Berzelia* is evident where the power cables cross the path. The sedge beds hold several pairs of **Victorin's Warbler** *Bradypterus victorini*—a secretive bird likely only to be glimpsed, as it keeps low in the undergrowth. It is particularly difficult to see in strong winds. Just beyond the sedge, a small and obscure path leads to the left. After 150 m it leads to a shallow gully, where at least two parties of the effervescent **Cape Rockjumper** *Chaetops frenatus* are regularly seen. Clamber onto the rocks on the west side, and if, at first, no success is had, head back to the parking lot along the top of the ridge—a party is bound to be seen or heard—



Cape Rockjumpers *Chaetops frenatus* by Mike Hodgson
(courtesy of BirdQuest)

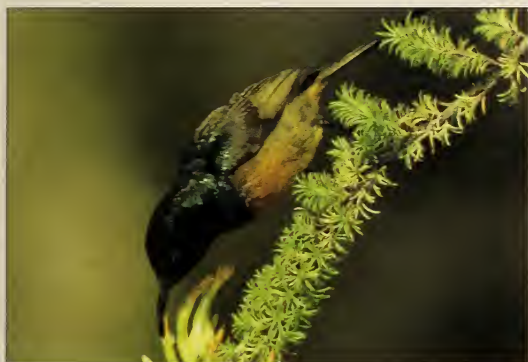
listen for the crescendo of their piping whistles! Other species here include **Ground Woodpecker**, **Cape Rock Thrush**, **Cape Siskin**, **Black Eagle** *Aquila verreauxii*, **Jackal Buzzard** *Buteo rufofuscus*, **Grey-backed Cisticola**, **Cape Bunting** *Emberiza capensis*, **Peregrine Falcon**, **White-necked Raven**, **Familiar Chat**, and rarely **Sentinel Rock Thrush** *Monticola explorator* and **Cape Eagle Owl** *Bubo capensis*.

From the ridge-top, looking toward Steenbras Dam, one can see a railway-line; the scarce **Striped Flufftail** *Sarothura affinis* has been seen below it. Although this bird can be almost impossible to see, it seems to show itself more frequently to foreign visitors! The pine plantations east of the canons and around Steenbras Dam hold breeding **Black Accipiter melanoleucus** and **Red-breasted Sparrowhawks** *A. rufiventris* and **Forest Buzzard**.

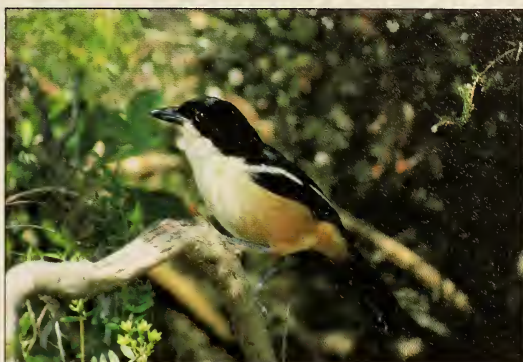
The West Coast (1–2 days)—a taste of Namaqualand

• Birds: 8/10 • Scenery: 7/10 • General tourism value: 6/10
Located c120 km north of Cape Town, in southern Namaqualand, this area's arid and rather bleak terrain is broken by some of South Africa's most impressive wetlands, particularly Langebaan Lagoon and the Berg River Estuary. In the austral summer, the Berg River holds the greatest densities of shorebirds on the entire eastern Atlantic flyway. Head out of Cape Town on the R27 via Milnerton. Approximately 90 km from Cape Town, the left turn to West Coast National Park (within which Langebaan Lagoon is enclosed) will be seen. If choosing to continue to the Berg River mouth, proceed along the R27 to Laaiplek, where you cross the river mouth just before entering town.

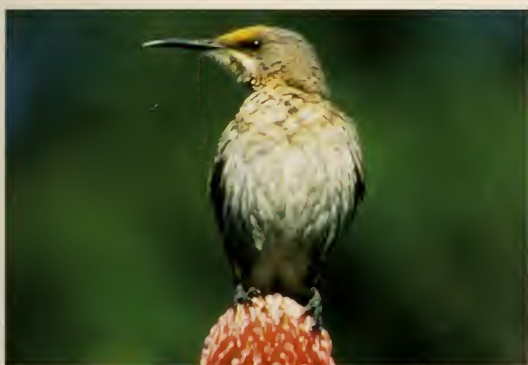
At Langebaan Lagoon, Palearctic waders abound in summer, particularly **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*, **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*, **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*, **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* and **Sanderling** *C. alba*. Extremely healthy numbers of resident shorebirds including **African**



1. Orange-breasted Sunbird *Nectarinia violacea* feeding on erica nectar (Percy FitzPatrick Institute)



3. Southern Boubou *Laniarius ferrugineus* (Sugarbird Images)



2. Cape Sugarbird *Promerops cafer* (Sugarbird Images)



4. Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria (aequinocialis) conspicillata* (Sugarbird Images)

Black Oystercatcher, White-fronted Plover, Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* and the scarce **Chestnut-banded Plover** *C. pallidus* supplement these. The marshes and sedge beds hold **African Marsh Harrier** as well as skulking palustrine specialists, including **Red-chested Flufftail** *Sarothura rufa* and **Kaffir Rail** *Rallus caerulescens*. The best hides are at Geelbek, where a walking trail to a series of salt pans also exists. Visit at low tide when the mudflats are exposed.

The vegetation and open cultivated fields surrounding the wetlands support an interesting avifauna, including conspicuous species not always easily seen elsewhere. The most absorbing among these are the striking **Black Harrier** *Circus maurus*, strident **Southern Black Korhaan** *Eupodotis afra afra*, **Capped Wheatear** *Oenanthe pileata*, **Thick-billed** *Galerida magnirostris* and **Red-capped Larks** *Calandrella cinerea*. Other common species include **Pied Spreo bicolor** and **Wattled Starlings** *Creatophora cinerea*, **Bokmakierie**, **Karoo Scrub-Robin** *Cercotrichas coryphaeus*, **Yellow Canary** *Serinus flaviventris* and **White-backed Mousebird**.

If additional time is available, head to Bird Island in

Lambert's Bay, one of only six islands in the world where **Cape Gannet** breeds. Here you will be able to watch their crazy antics at point blank range. It is an amazing spectacle that entralls not only birders—particularly now that a new high-tech hide offers face-to-face encounters with the birds. The island also holds **Jackass Penguin, Bank, Crowned** and **Cape Cormorants**.

Part II—the Garden Route

Probably the most under-rated birding area in South Africa, the area between Cape Town and Tsitsikamma National Park, and the virtually unbirded Outeniqua and Swartberg ranges inland, offer splendid scenery and a higher concentration of South African endemics than any other area in the country.

Overberg and De Hoop (1–2 days)

• Birds: 8/10 • Scenery: 7/10 • General tourism value: 6/10

If heading to the garden route from Cape Town, an excellent area to explore for a day is the Overberg and De Hoop Nature Reserve. Follow the N2 from Cape Town, via Sir Lowry's Pass (see part I) to Caledon; turn onto the R316 and continue to Bredasdorp (c74 km). The R316 between Caledon

and Bredasdorp is prime Overberg country, nestled on the coastal plain, and sheltered by the rugged Langeberg Mountains to the north, the Overberg stretches to Cape Agulhas—the southernmost point in Africa. Once a series of plains of lowland fynbos, the majority of the original vegetation has been replaced by wheat. It is not all bad news however, as many interesting birds, particularly some rare ones, have adapted remarkably well. Parties of stately **Blue Crane** *Anthropoides paradisaea* stride through the area. Although once rare here, more than 30% of the global population now congregates in this area annually. The fields are also home to **Denham's Bustard** *Neotis denbami*, **Thick-billed Lark**, **Red-capped Lark** and the highly range-restricted **Agulhas Long-billed Lark** *Certhilauda (curvirostris) brevirostris*. Occasionally **Secretary Birds** *Sagittarius serpentarius* can be seen pulverising hapless snakes near the road. These species are possible anywhere along this road, and numerous stops to look and listen are advised. Stop also in the small patches of remaining renosterbos (Rhino-bush) and strandveld to look for the stunning **Southern Black Korhaan**.

From Bredasdorp, take the Swellendam road (R319). After 7 km turn right to Wydgelee, 29 km further turn right to De Hoop and continue 10 km to the gate. De Hoop, in stark contrast to the wheatbelt, comprises a unique diversity of natural habitats. These include rugged coastline, pristine beaches and sand dunes, a wide coastal plain holding remnant fragments of the highly threatened lowland fynbos and some bizarre and unique limestone hills incised by the 15 km-long De Hoop Vlei. The Ramsar-designated vlei is actually a coastal lake, often excellent for waterbirds; **Cape Shoveler** is one of 75 species of waterfowl regularly recorded here. The Milkwoods surrounding the vlei support **Southern Tchagra** *Tchagra tchagra*. An isolated sandstone

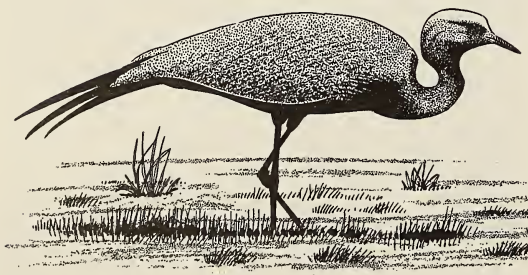
inselberg, called Potberg, rises abruptly in the east of the reserve, surrounded by a sea of wind-derived aeolian sand. This small inselberg is the only home for several plant species, including two spectacular Proteas. It also holds the last **Cape Vulture** *Gyps coprotheres* colony (c30 pairs) in the Western Cape as well as small but significant populations of **Striped Flufftail** and **Black-rumped Button-Quail**. Other special species among the list of 260 recorded at the reserve are **Pied Starling**, **Orange-throated (Cape) Longclaw** *Macronyx capensis*, **Bokmakierie**, **Pearl-breasted Swallow** *Hirundo dimidiata*, **Pied Barbet** *Tricholaema leucomelas*, **Black Harrier**, **African Black Oystercatcher** and eight species of canary *Serinus* spp. **Cape Francolin** is extremely tame, particularly at the campsite where they will forage less than a metre away, while **Fiery-necked Nightjar** *Caprimulgus pectoralis* is common around the cottages at night, belting out its crescendo call.

The Garden Route (3–4 days)

• Birds: 8/10 • Scenery: 10/10 • General tourism value: 6/10

Located c450 km east of Cape Town, this picturesque and dainty mosaic of fynbos and forest gardens is scattered among a plethora of lakes, lagoons and seashores. Knysna is the closest area to Cape Town holding large tracts of Cape temperate forest and it makes a wonderful base to explore this striking area. Several accommodation options are available in Knysna, check the Sugarbird Home page <http://home.mweb.co.za/kb/kbarnes> for a full listing. The most notable option is the Bush Camp in Phantom Forest Eco-reserve (Tel: 27-44-386-0046; Fax: 27-44-387-1944; e-mail: phantomforest@mweb.co.za). This luxurious camp is located within the forest on Phantom Pass and its fast-growing reputation as one of South Africa's finest eco-tourism destinations is not unfounded. All the endemic forest specials have been found on the property as has **Narina Trogon** *Apaloderma narina* and other 'most wanted' birds. Canopy towers are currently under construction, exclusively for the use of paying lodge-birders. To reach the reserve, take the first turn to the left on entering Knysna (from Cape Town), before you cross the bridge. Do not peel round under the bridge, but head straight along the shore of the lagoon on Phantom Pass Road for c1 km. Follow the signs to Phantom Forest Eco-reserve.

Many other forest patches exist; particularly good are those at Diepwalle and Big Tree. Further along the N2 (c80 km), the small town of Nature's Valley has many cheap B&Bs and is surrounded by excellent forest. A particularly quaint spot here is called Tourist Lodge (Tel: 27-04457-6681).



Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradisaea* by Mike Hodgson (courtesy of BirdQuest)

Spend most time in the tall cathedral-type forests. Sometimes deathly silent, the twittering of a bird party can break the lethargy of the forest. Mixed-species flocks comprising **Bar-throated Apalis** *Apalithboracia*, **Blue-mantled Flycatcher** *Trochocercus cyanomelas*, **Grey Cuckoo-Shrike** *Coracinacaesia* and **Yellow-throated Warbler** *Phylloscopus ruficapilla* sally and glean insects from the canopy of buttressed Yellowwood and Ironwood trees. Be on the lookout for **Knysna Woodpecker** *Campethera notata*, which frequently utters its characteristic staccato scream. The cool mossy rocks, fungus-flecked ground and fern glades are home to parties of chuckling **Terrestrial Brownbul** *Phyllastrephus terrestris* as well as **White-starred Robin** *Pogonocichla stellata* and **Chorister Robin-Chat** *Cossypha dichroa*. Track any raucous croaking which may herald a **Knysna Turaco** *Tauraco (persa) corythaix*. Look for fruiting trees as they may hold flocks of **Black-bellied Glossy Starling** *Lamprotornis corruscus*. Low hooting, particularly in spring (September–November), may bring, with luck, a view of the fabled **Narina Trogon**. Keep scanning overhead for breeding **Mountain Buzzard** which regularly issue a plaintive *kleenr* call. The constant churring of the **Cape Batis** will give this pokey insectivore away, but the cryptic **Olive Bush-Shrike** *Malaconotus olivaceus* is more difficult to see, although it does respond to whistled imitations of its call. On the forest floor, several skulkers—the noisy **Red-necked Spurfowl** *Francolinus afer* and **Cinnamon** and **Tambourine Doves** *Turtur tympanistria*—are more frequently heard than seen. In summer, the piercing *pretty gorgie* whistle of arguably Africa's most dazzling cuckoo, the **African Emerald Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx cupreus*, is blasted from treetops almost as lush as the bird itself. Also common are **African Goshawk** *Accipiter tachiro*, **Olive Woodpecker** *Dendropicus griseocephalus*, **Black Saw-wing** *Psalidoprocne pristoptera*, **Sombre Bulbul**, **Fork-tailed Drongo** *Dicrurus adsimilis*, **Bleating Bush Warbler** *Camaroptera brachyura*, **Southern Boubou**, **Dusky Flycatcher**, **Eastern Black-headed Oriole** *Oriolus larvatus* and **African Paradise Flycatcher**. At night, the bubbling call of the **Wood Owl** *Strix woodfordii* is not uncommon and keep an ear open for the phantom-like foghorn hooting of the diminutive **Buff-spotted Flufftail** *Sarothura elegans*, one of Africa's hardest forest birds to see.

The forest edge also has its specialists, including the bracken-dependent **Knysna Warbler**, a very difficult bird to see, even when it is calling in September–October. The Knysna Heads hold a sig-

nificant population of these. Far easier to find is the seed-eating endemic **Forest Canary**, **Swee Waxbill** *Estrilda melanotis* and **Greater Double Collared Nectarinia** *afra* and **Black Sunbirds** *N. amethystina*. The rolling hills expose chunks of fynbos on their crests. When in flower, the red ericas are adorned with **Orange-breasted Sunbirds**. **Cape Sugarbird**, vociferous **Victorin's Warbler** and other fynbos specialities are also easily seen here.

Also visit Tsitsikamma National Park where **Southern Right Whales** *Eubalaena australis* come inshore to breed and calve. In the park there is excellent forest, holding many of the species listed above. The Groot River is known to hold several river-dependent species more typical of tropical rivers including **Half-collared Kingfisher** *Alcedo semitorquata* and the elusive **African Finfoot** *Podica senegalensis* and **White-backed Night Heron** *Gorsachius leuconotus*. Within the park, the Storms River Mouth restcamp, with its excellent cottages and facilities, is recommended—contact South African National Parks (Tel: 27-12-343-1991; Fax: 27-12-343-0905; e-mail: reservations@parks-sa.co.za) for details.

Swartberg Pass (1–2 days add-on to 7 or 8)

• Birds: 9/10 • Scenery: 10/10 • General tourism value: 7/10

This route is only possible if combined with a trip to the Garden Route or Karoo National Park, or preferably both, as it links these two dramatically different destinations. Nowhere is the striking variability of South Africa more evident than on the short drive between Knysna and Prince Albert, taking in the Outeniqua and Swartberg mountains. Temperate evergreen forests cloak the shady southern mountain slopes, well-watered by coastal mists and year-round rainfall, while succulent desert plants cling to the blistered northern valley floors, sweltering in the rain-shadow of the mountains. From Knysna, one should head back on the N2 towards George. Leaving the N2 at the George turn-off, head along the N9 over the Outeniqua Pass and then take the N12 to Oudtshoorn. The many lay-byes are worth a stop, scan for fynbos specials and **Black** and **Martial Eagles** *Polemaetus bellicosus*, which are seen here regularly. Once over the pass, the vegetation will begin to look decidedly scrubby—you are now in the Little Karoo. On reaching Oudtshoorn, keep heading straight—the N12 branches to the right—along the R328 to Prince Albert, following signs to Congo Caves. Take the Schoemanspoort Pass and follow all signs to Prince Albert/Swartberg Pass—bypassing the turn-off to the Congo Caves. The road turns to dirt shortly thereafter. As one ascends the pass, the scrub turns to fynbos, with the associated gamut of com-



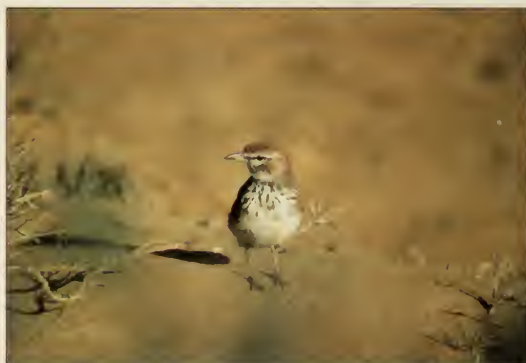
5. Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua*
(Sugarbird Images)



7. Red-capped Lark *Calandrella cinerea*, easily identified by the rufous shoulder patch and crown (Sugarbird Images)



6. Slater's Lark *Spizocorys sclateri* is best identified by its heavy bill and tear-drop line below the eye (Sugarbird Images)



8. Barlow's Lark *Certhilauda barlowi* is now considered a distinct species from the closely related Karoo Lark *C. albescens*, on the basis of its heavier breast streaking and notable differences in genetic composition and song structure (Sugarbird Images)

mon fynbos birds. Higher up, the bushes become smaller and the proportion of exposed rock increases. Pause at the top, called Die Top: on either side of the road a group of **Cape Rockjumpers** can be found. The grating *keaurghgh* of **Ground Woodpecker** is not uncommon here. **Cape** and **Sentinel Rock Thrushes** can also be seen. Two to three kilometres further, the road to Die Hel branches off left. This junction is excellent for **Cape Siskin**. A little farther, a large stand of *Protea* trees hosts **Cape Sugarbird**, **Orange-breasted Sunbird**, **Grassbird** and on occasion, the scarce **Protea Canary** *Serinus leucopterus*. Descending to Prince Albert, soaring cliffs with spectacular rock formations line the 20-km gravel road. At high altitude, search for soaring **Black**, **Booted** *Hieraaetus pennatus* and **Martial Eagles**. As you enter the drier gorge the avifauna changes rapidly—keep your eyes peeled for **Pale-winged Starling** *Onychognathus nabouroup* and **Mountain Chat** *Oenanthe monticola* on the cliffs, and **Malachite Sunbird** on the aloes. Just before exiting the canyon, the river supports some luxurious *Acacia karoo* scrub; stop here for **Fairy Flycatcher**

Stenostira scita, **White-throated Canary** *Serinus albogularis*, **White-backed Mousebird**, **Layard's Tit-Babbler** *Parisoma layardi*, **Long-billed Crombec** *Sylvietta rufescens* and **Karoo Scrub-Robin**. The canyon ends abruptly, and c4 km beyond, a small picnic/camping spot is located on the left, just before the Klaarstroom road intersection. Pause here, as **Namaqua Warbler** *Phragmacia substriata* and **Pirit Batis** *Batis pririt* are common in the grove of trees.

Whether heading back to Cape Town, or on to Karoo National Park, it is possible (and advisable) to overnight in Prince Albert, as the karoo vegetation is most productive at dawn. The Hotel Swartberg (top-range), Rozie's (mid-range) and Huis Adriaan or Hooggenoeg Holiday Houses (budget) are recommended. Call the Prince Albert Tourism Bureau for bookings and more information (Tel: 27-23-5411-366). The small series of hills east of town hold a few parties of **Karoo Eremomela** *Eremomela gregalis*. The plains north of Prince Albert are best in the early morning. Although the R353 is productive (bird the Gamka riverbed where it crosses the road c8 km before the N1), if you have time available, take the

dirt road to Seekoegat (the only road heading right on leaving Prince Albert), 1 km north of town. Stop and bird extensively in the (usually dry) Oukloof riverbed. If any water is lying, look for the nomadic **Black-headed Canary** *Serinus alario*. While driving across the plains, keep a lookout for the low-density **Ludwig's Bustard** *Neotis ludwigii* and **Karoo Korhaan** *Eupodotis vigorsii*. Stop occasionally to look and listen for **Rufous-eared Warbler** *Malcorus pectoralis* and a host of **larks** in this area (many species are similar to those at Karoo National Park described below). Proceed to Karoo National Park, on the N1, South Africa's premier highway; the entrance is 5 km south-west of Beaufort West.

Karoo National Park (2–3 days)

• Birds: 8/10 • Scenery: 7/10 • General tourism value: 6/10

The Khoisan hunter-gatherers, the oldest inhabitants of South Africa, called the central plateau the 'Karoo', or "place of great dryness". Chalets, cottages and camping are available in the National Park—and there is an air-conditioned restaurant (to book tel: 27-201-5-2828/9 or fax: 27-201-5-1671). Underlying its barren appearance, the Karoo biome is home to some 5,000 species of plant—more than are in Canada. It holds one third of all the world's succulent plant species. The park represents one of the more spectacular parts of the Karoo, with the impressive Nuweveld escarpment, which rises to 1,900 m, forming the backdrop for the lower plains. Despite only 170 bird species having been recorded in the park, it is extremely important for Namib-Karoo biome-restricted species, as well as supporting a host of other arid-zone specialities. The lowland plains have **Ludwig's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Spike-heeled Lark** *Chersomanes albobasata*, **Karoo Lark** *Certhilauda albescens*, **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix verticalis*, **Tractrac Chat** *Cercomela tractrac*, **Karoo Chat** *C. schlegelii*, **Karoo Eremomela** and **Rufous-eared Warbler**. **Black-headed Canary** occurs whenever there is seeding grass and water. The belts of riverine *Acacia karoo* woodland hold **Namaqua Warbler** and provide food, shelter and breeding habitat for many other species. The thicket and scrub on the slopes support **Layard's Tit-Babbler** and **Southern Grey Tit** *Parus afer*. In very wet years, nomadic **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix australis* and **Lark-like Bunting** *Emberiza impetuani* arrive to breed in large numbers, and are then absent until the next heavy rains, which may be up to decades apart. In exceptional rain years, **Sclater's Lark** *Spizocorys sclateri* has also been recorded. The secretive and localised **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** *Euryptila subcinnamomea*, **African Rock Pipit**

Anthus crenatus, **Pale-winged Starling** and **Ground Woodpecker** occur in rocky gorges and kloofs while **Sickle-winged Chat** *Cercomela sinuata* is found in plateau scrub. The best area to find these species is Klipspringer Pass. At the top of the plateau, there are several stopping points to peer into a gorge that holds most of these species. **African Rock Pipit** is often heard calling, and is occasionally seen, from above the Fonteintjies walking trail. The newly described **Karoo Long-billed Lark** *Certhilauda (curvirostris) subcoronata* (see *Auk* 116: 194–208) is common throughout the park. Other arid-zone species occurring here are **Dusky Sunbird** *Nectarinia fusca*, which is a nomad, not seen elsewhere in the Western Cape and **Pale Chanting Goshawk** *Melierax canorus*, **Pirit Batis**, **Fairy Flycatcher**, **Cape Penduline Tit** *Anthoscopus minutus* and **White-throated Canary**.

Gamka Dam on the Grootplaat has the only permanent surface water in the park and supports a host of waterbirds, including **Cape Shoveler**, **South African Shelduck** and **Yellow-billed Duck** *Anas undulata*. The cliffs near the dam have breeding **Black** and **Booted Eagles**, and **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*. Beaufort West has several large *Eucalyptus* trees which support up to 10,000 roosting **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* in summer; the birds disperse during the day to forage on the plains surrounding the town.

While hunting for birds, you may bump into other karroid beasts such as **Cloete's Girdled Lizard** *Cordylus cloetei*, **Brack's Dwarf Leaf-toed Gecko** *Goggia braacki* and **Thin-skinned thick-toed Gecko** *Pachydactylus kladeroderma*; all of which have minute global ranges, restricted to tiny portions of the Nuweveld escarpment. Other endemics include **Grant's Rock Mouse** *Aethomyis granti*, **Namaqua Chameleon** *Chamaeleo namaquensis*, **Karoo Dwarf Chameleon** *Brachypodion karroicum*, **Greater Homopus femoralis** and **Boulenger's Padlopers** *H. boulengeri*, **Tent Tortoise** *Psammobates tentorius*, **Spotted House Snake** *Lamprophis guttatus*, **Common Long-tailed Seps** *Tetradactylus tetradactylus* and a host of endemic **lizards** and **geckos**. The park holds many species that once roamed these plains in greater numbers prior to human intervention. The threatened **Black Rhinoceros** *Diceros bicornis*, and the endemic **Cape Mountain Zebra** *Equus zebra zebra* (the second largest population in the world), **Black Wildebeest** *Connocabetes gnou* and **Springbok** *Antidorcas marsupialis* roam here. Threatened species such as **Leopard** *Panthera pardus*, **Small Spotted Cat** *Felis nigripes*, **Aardwolf** *Proteles cristata*,

Aardvark *Orycteropus afer*, **Sclater's Golden Mole** *Chlorotalpa sclateri*, **Melck's Serotine Bat** *Eptesicus melckorum*, **Lesuer's Hairy Bat** *Myotis lesueuri* and **Spectacled Dormouse** *Graphiurus ocellatus* also occur in the park. Night drives can be arranged with staff and may prove spectacular, particularly if the mythical **Aardvark** is seen.

Part III—the arid interior

South Africa's arid interior does not offer the highest bird diversity, but by far the highest proportion of endemics; every second bird seen here is not seen anywhere else in the world! The closest site to Cape Town offering 'real' Karoo birds is Tankwa Karoo. Largely untouched by development and criss-crossed with dirt roads, one has to stay in Ceres or camp if wanting to spend more than a day in this area.

Ceres & Tankwa Karoo (1–2 days)—the thirstlands

• Birds: 10/10 • Scenery: 9/10 • General tourism value: 5/10

From Cape Town the easy route is to follow the National Road (N1) to just short of Worcester, where you turn north onto the R43 toward Wolseley and Ceres. Follow signposts to Ceres. Just before arriving in Ceres you traverse Mitchell's Pass and c5 km before town a small kiosk on the left-hand side, called Die Tolhuis, has a small parking lot. Occasionally **Forest Canary** and **Sweet Waxbill** forage on the grass here. The thicket of pastel green *Protea neriifolia* on the hillside is exceptionally interesting. A small dirt path behind Die Tolhuis leads to a railway. It is possible to walk beside this but beware, trains still run on this line. Search for **Protea Canary** as it is frequent here—although some time may be required to locate it and keep in mind that **Streaky-headed Canary** *Serimulgularis* is common here. Other fynbos birds abound. The mountains are excellent for **raptors** and there is a good chance of seeing **Jackal Buzzard**, **Black** and **Booted Eagles**.

Once in Ceres fill up with fuel—there will be no more fuel stations until you return to Ceres. Continue east along the R46 over Theronsberg Pass, shortly after which you traverse a small valley called Karooport (45 km east of Ceres). Karooport is easily recognised as the area where the road changes to dirt and after a kilometre changes back to tar and then finally reverts to dirt again. The river and reeds here hold **Namaqua Warbler**. Rocky crags around Karooport support **Pale-winged Starling**. The arid flats are only 20 km beyond Karooport. The rainfall gradient drops from 1,200 mm p.a. in the Ceres Mountains to as little as 180 mm p.a. around Katbakkies. As you emerge from Karooport onto

the plains start looking for **Karoo Chat**, **Yellow Canary**, **White-throated Canary**, **Southern Ant-eater-Chat**, *Myrmecocichla formicivora*, **Sickle-winged Chat**, **Pied Starling**, **Bokmakierie**, and **Jackal Buzzard** and **Pale Chanting Goshawk** perching on telephone and electricity poles.

Approximately 5 km beyond the Sutherland turn-off a number of small dams appear on the right-hand side, as well as a larger dam on a farm called Inverdoorn; all are private property, so please respect this. Stop on the road and scope for a host of waterfowl including **South African Shelduck**, **Cape Shoveler** and **Maccoa Duck**; occasionally even **flamingos** have been seen. In midsummer the dam can be dry.

Just north of Inverdoorn two isolated glacial tillite hills rise (one on each side of the road). A narrow road leads off to the east (right-hand side) hill. Park at the base and look for the main prize here—**Karoo Eremomela**. Generally scarce in the Karoo, this feisty little warbler is not uncommon here. **Rufous-eared Warbler**, **Sickle-winged Chat**, **Southern Grey Tit**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Spike-heeled Lark** and **Karoo Lark** are also common. The surrounding plains are reliable for **Karoo Korhaan**, and occasionally (in winter) **Ludwig's Bustard**. North of the hills, **Tractrac Chats** and **Southern Black Korhaan** are more regular and the *kelkieuyn* call of **Namaqua Sandgrouse** *Pterocles namaqua* is more evident—although getting good views is hard. It is best to look for the species at c10.00 hrs when they tend to drink. Twenty kilometres north of the tillites, a sign to Op-die-Berg and Kagga Kamma indicates a road leading off to the left. Follow the turn for 2 km to a small gully draped in spiky aloe plants. When the valley opens into a small *Acacia*-lined rivercourse, a narrow road peels off to the left. It is possible to camp at this small picnic site, but keep in mind that facilities are basic. There is clean running drinkable water and a long-drop toilet, and not much else. This place, known as Katbakkies, is famous as being the most accessible site in South Africa for **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler**—the hardest karoo bird of all. Dubbed a "mini-rockjumper", it often resembles a mouse more than a bird, hopping about in tiny gaps between stone slabs, it may leap out momentarily, only to bound along a koppie ridge at high speed. There are several pairs in the gorges, and walking the riverbed or over the ridge opposite the canyon entrance offers the best chance of these elusive birds. The *Acacia* woodland is productive for **Fairy Flycatcher**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Pirit Batis**, **Cape Bunting** and **Pied Barbet**. The cliffs and rocky areas hold **Mountain Chat**, **Southern Grey Tit** and **Ground Woodpecker**. At night, **Freckled Night-jar** *Caprimulgus tristigma* has been recorded in this area and **Cape Eagle Owl** has been found on several occa-



Double-banded Coursers *Rhinoptilus africanus*
by Mike Hodgson (courtesy of BirdQuest)

sions 4–5 km from the campsite. In wet years **Black-headed Canary** and **Lark-like Bunting** can be common. **Thick-billed Lark**, **Cape Long-billed Lark** *Certhilauda curvirostris* (see *Auk* 116: 194–208), **Red-capped Lark** and **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark** occur throughout the area. **Cape Penduline Tit** and **Yellow-bellied Eremomela** *Eremomela icteropygialis* occur along rivers and in scrub throughout. **Double-banded Courser** *Rhinoptilus africanus* has been seen on the Calvinia road north of Katbakkies, particularly in areas devoid of cover. **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark** has also been very occasionally recorded breeding.

Keep your eyes peeled for other wonderful beasts, including the magnificent **Red Adder** *Bitis rubida*, globally restricted to the Tankwa Karoo and only described in 1997. **McLachlan's Girdled Lizard** *Cordylus mclachlani* and the magnificent **Armadillo Girdled Lizard** *C. cataphractus*, rolling up to expose its spiny back when threatened, are globally restricted to this tiny portion of the Karoo. Remember to bring a spotlight as a night drive in the Karoo may not yield **Lions** *Panthera leo* and **African Elephants** *Loxodonta africana*, but it is no less spectacular. Those enamoured by smaller beasts will not be disappointed: **Steenbok** *Raphicerus campestris* is common here and you may bump into other antelopes such as **Klipspringer** *Oreotragus oreotragus* and **Grey Rhebok** *Pelea capreolus*. **Genets** and **mongooses** are frequent and you may be fortunate and see **Striped Polecat** *Mustela putorius*. Some extremely rare and seldom seen mammals are found here, including **African Lynx** (Rooikat) *Felis caracal*, **Aardvark** and **Aardwolf**—both bizarre termite specialists—and **Cape Mountain Leopard** has occasionally been spotted in the gully behind the campsite.

Farther afield—the desert frontier

Orange River, Springbok & Bushmanland (4–6 days)—the diamond coast lark run

If you are feeling adventurous, an additional bounty of endemics lies in the Northern Cape. From Cape Town take the N7 to Springbok. Several **Cape Eagle Owl**

roadkills have been found at Burke's Pass, c15 km south of Springbok—suggesting that it is reasonably common here. At Springbok, either head east to Pofadder or take a loop to find the recently described **Barlow's Lark** *Certhilauda barlowi* (see *Ibis* 140: 605–619). For this species, head north on the N7 to Steinkopf and Port Nolloth on the R382 via Anenous Pass. Once in Port Nolloth, take the coast road north to Alexander Bay. Barlow's Lark occurs north of the Holgat River, but Karoo Lark also occurs here and the two do hybridise in this zone. It is therefore best to head to Alexander Bay, and then east along the road to Khubus. At Pachtvlei Picnic Area on the Orange River, a pair of **Barlow's Lark** frequents the junction at the main road. If you still have no luck, keep heading east, stop where there are dune-type slacks, which the bird prefers—it is common once you reach the turn-off to Brandkaros. Rocky outcrops here hold **Cape Long-billed Lark**. With prior organisation, it is possible to visit the Orange River Mouth at Alexander Bay (run by the Diamond Mining Alexkor. See the company's website (<http://www.diamondcoast.co.za>) to organize a permit to visit the mouth). The estuary of this, South Africa's largest river, is the only permanent wetland on one of the world's driest stretches of coast. The dunes south of the river mouth (no access) hold breeding **Damara Terns** *Sterna balaenarum*—which are occasionally seen at the mouth. Return to Springbok via Port Nolloth, as the roads via the Richtersveld are poor.

Accommodation options in Springbok include the Springbok Hotel (tel: 27-251-21161; fax: 27-2251-22257). For cheaper options check the Sugarbird Home page <http://home.mweb.co.za/kb/kbarnes> for a full listing.

Head toward Pofadder on the N14. After c100 km a small dirt road heads toward Aggenys. Take this road and look for the distinctly warm red dunes, home to **Red Lark** *Certhilauda burra*; **Karoo Lark** is absent here so there should be no confusion. Continue on toward Pofadder scanning the enormous **Sociable Weaver** *Philetairus socius* colonies for signs of **Pygmy Falcon** *Polibierax semitorquatus* which breed in these enormous nests. If you have time for diversions, head north from Pofadder on the R358; **Sabota Lark** *Mirafra sabota* is not uncommon and **Stark's Lark** *Eremalauda starki* can be found in this area. Onseepkans, on the Orange River, provides other new birds, including small flocks of **Rosy-faced Lovebird** *Agapornis roseicollis*.

Your main route should take you south of Pofadder on the R358; after c25 km, turn east on the dirt road to Kenhardt. Thirty km beyond the turn-off look for clumps of small bush interspersed with black pebbly quartz, almost entirely devoid of vegetation—this is the home of **Sclater's Lark**, a nomadic and opportunistic

species. If the fields don't bring luck, check the many small dams where the larks regularly drink, particularly those on the edges of these fields. Another nomadic Bushmanland speciality usually encountered in large numbers in this area is **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark**, and when rainfall is significant, so are **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark** and **Lark-like Bunting**. Other, more common, larks you are likely to see are **Karoo Long-billed**, **Thick-billed**, **Red-capped**, **Karoo** and **Spike-heeled Larks**. Larks, however, are not the only bounty. The open plains also support **Burchell's *Cursorius rufus*** and **Double-banded Coursers**, **Sickle-winged**, **Karoo** and **Tractrac Chats**, **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Ludwig's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Chat Flycatcher *Melaenornis infuscatus***, **Karoo Eremomela** and **Black-headed Canary**. The wooded rivers hold **Pirit Batis** and **Namaqua Warbler**.

Other species more characteristic of the Kalahari that one is unlikely to see farther south include **Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus nigricans***, **Black-chested *Prinia Prinia flavicans***, **Ashy Tit *Parus cinerascens*** and **Scaly-feathered Finch *Sporopipes squamifrons***. This trip is best combined with Ceres and the Tankwa Karoo or Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park.

Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park

Sandwiched between the Nossob and Auob rivers, the Kalahari-Gemsbok—one of Africa's great national parks and South Africa's second largest—covers 960,000 ha. Along with the adjacent Gemsbok National Park in Botswana, it comprises a conservation area of over 3.6 million ha, forming the southern portion of one of the last truly great wilderness areas in Africa—the Kalahari. Cottages and camping options are available. It is worth spending one night at the camp at Twee Rivieren (park entrance), which is excellent for **owls**, and at least one night at Nossob (several hours drive from the entrance), to spend an early morning birding north of there. Only Twee Rivieren has a restaurant, the other camps have basic shops. Booking is essential and can be made via the parks reservations offices in Pretoria (tel: 27-21-343-1991; fax: 27-21-343-0905; e-mail: reservations@parks-sa.co.za) or you can contact the park at (tel: 27-54-561-0021; fax: 27-54-561-0026).

To reach the park, head to Upington via the N14 or N10, and then north on the R360, which is a dirt road, although perfectly passable by two-wheel-drive vehicles. Remember to get there before 18.00 hrs (or earlier if you are booked at Nossob), the gate closing hours. Due to the abundance of game here, raptors are a major feature of the park and over 30 species have been recorded including **Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos***, **White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis***, **Martial Eagle**, **Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus***, **Brown Snake-Eagle *Circaetus cinereus***, **Black-**



Pygmy Falcon *Polibierax semitorquatus* by Mike Hodgson (courtesy of BirdQuest)

breasted Snake-Eagle *C. gallicus* pectoralis. **Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*** and the local and scarce **Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera***. **Secretary Bird** stalks the dunes where **Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*** is common: **Ludwig's Bustard** also occurs. Waterholes attract **Burchell's *Pterocles burchelli*** and **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, occasionally in large numbers. The thornveld holds Kalahari Basin birds including parties of **Pied Babbler *Turdoides bicolor***, **Kalahari Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas paena***, **Crimson-breasted Shrike *Laniarius atrococcineus***, **Burchell's Glossy Starling *Lamprolaima australis***, **Shaft-tailed Whydah *Vidua regia***, **Barred Wren-Warbler (Southern Barred Warbler) *Calamonastes fasciolatus***, **Marico Flycatcher *Melaenornis mariquensis*** and awesome colonies of **Social Weaver** with **Pygmy Falcon** in attendance.

Following rain, a flash of colour is brought by the **finches** and **waxbills**, which occur in abundance, as a profusion of annuals and grasses flower and seed. **Black-headed** and **White-throated Canaries**, **Red-headed *Amadina erythrocephala*** and **Cut-throat Finches *A. fasciata***, and **Black-cheeked *Estrilda erythronotos*** and **Violet-eared Waxbills *Uraeginthus granatinus*** are most frequent. The Kalahari is also the haunt of a profusion of nocturnal hunters; dusk signals a chorus change and the campsites, particularly that at Twee Rivieren, resound with the calls of **White-faced Scops Owl *Otus leucotis***, **African Scops Owl *O. senegalensis***, **Pearl-spotted Owlet *Glaucidium perlatum*** and **Giant Eagle-Owl *Bubo lacteus***, and the gear-changing churning of **Rufous-cheeked Night-jar *Caprimulgus rufigena*** is ever-present. The resonant guttural grunting of **Lion** adds to the splendid nocturnal clamour. Of course, while birding you are likely to find other denizens of the desert, including **Leopard**, **Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus***, **Spotted *Crocuta crocuta*** and **Brown Hyenas *Hyaena brunnea***, the magnificent **Gemsbok** (once thought to be the mythical unicorn), **Blue Wildebeest *Connochaetes taurinus***, **Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelas***, **Red Hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus***, **Springbok**, **Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis*** and the fascinatingly social and gregarious **Meercat *Suricata suricata***. 🐾

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